

GULF OF MEXICO (GULF)

GENERIC ANNUAL CATCH LIMITS / ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES AMENDMENT TO GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

JANUARY 2012

Why are management changes needed?

- Annual catch limits and accountability measures are required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.
- Annual catch limits are the highest level of landings that is acceptable to maintain the stock.
- Optional annual catch targets are a level of landings that provides protection against exceeding the annual catch limits.
- Accountability measures help keep landings within the catch limits or catch targets, or allow managers to make adjustments if those levels are exceeded.
- For more information, please see the [General Annual Catch Limit Frequently Asked Questions page](#).

What are the proposed changes to management in the amendment?

- Management of two species would be delegated to other authorities.
- Ten species would be removed from federal management.
- Species complexes would be established for stocks that share a common habitat and are caught with the same gear in the same area at the same time.
- Annual catch limits and annual catch targets would be established.
- Accountability measures would be established.
- The framework procedure (which allows for more timely implementation of routine regulatory changes) would be updated.

Which species will have catch limits, catch targets, and accountability measures?

- Approximately 50 species are subject to action in this amendment including reef fish, red drum, royal red shrimp, and corals.
- Other stocks are not addressed in this amendment.
 - Annual species such as shrimp (other than royal red shrimp), which are not required to have catch limits and accountability measures.
 - Four species that have been identified as overfished (population abundance is too low) and undergoing overfishing (rate of removal is too high), and catch limits and accountability measures for these stocks were established previously: gag, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, and red snapper.
 - King mackerel, Spanish mackerel, cobia, and spiny lobster are managed jointly by two Councils and are addressed in separate amendments. For more information, please see the [Coastal Migratory Pelagics FAQs](#) and the [Spiny Lobster FAQs](#).

Why are species being transferred to other authorities?

- Some federally managed species in Gulf federal waters are either uncommon or their occurrence and harvest is predominately within the jurisdiction of other management agencies.
- The South Atlantic Council has agreed to manage Nassau grouper throughout its range in both the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions.
- The majority of octocoral harvest occurs in South Atlantic-managed waters, and the South Atlantic Council will continue to manage octocorals in their region. Florida manages octocorals in its state waters of the Gulf of Mexico and will assume management of octocorals in Gulf federal waters as well.

Why are species being recommended for removal from federal management?

- In the process of developing new federal regulations, NOAA Fisheries Service and the Gulf Council reviewed all of their fishery management plans to determine which species are still in need of federal management. Ten species were determined to not need continued management: Anchor tilefish, misty grouper, sand perch, dwarf sand perch, blackline tilefish, schoolmaster, red hind, rock hind, dog snapper, and mahogany snapper.
- These species have average landings less than 15,000 pounds each year or are harvested primarily in state waters.
- These species were originally included in the reef fish management plan “for data collection purposes,” but data collection on any species can be required of fishermen and dealers that hold federal permits, regardless of the presence of that species in a fishery management plan.
- If landings or effort changed for any of these species and the Council determined management at the federal level was needed, these species could be added back into the management plan at a later date.

How are catch limits set?

- Control rules are established that determine the way in which catch limits are set for a species or species complex based on the amount of information available about the stock, and whether the stock is overfished or undergoing overfishing.
- Some stocks have been apportioned between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils before catch limits are set: black grouper, yellowtail snapper, and mutton snapper.
- Some stocks share a common habitat and are caught with the same gear in the same area at the same time. Grouping these stocks into species complexes allows a single catch limit to be set for the whole complex.
- Species with recent stock assessments have individual catch limits.

What are accountability measures?

- Accountability measures are actions to be taken if the annual catch limit for a species or species complex is met or projected to be met during a fishing year.
- In-season actions will be implemented during the same fish season the catch limit or catch target is reached or projected to be reached.
- Post-season actions will be implemented in the following fishing season if the catch limit or catch target is exceeded.

What does the framework procedure do?

- The framework procedure provides a mechanism for timely implementation of routine actions and acts as a guideline for implementing such actions in a consistent manner.
- The framework procedure increases the flexibility of the Gulf Council and NOAA Fisheries Service by identifying measures that could be changed under the procedure, and would clarify the appropriate process needed for each type of change.